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A dredger bearing the brunt of high waves due to cyclone Tauktae at Surathkal Beach near Mangaluru on Sunday | PTI

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TAUKTAE POUNDS WEST COAST, GUJARAT LANDFALL ON MAY 18

It has intensified into a very severe cyclonic storm, with wind speed reaching 175 kmph. Orange alert in three Kerala dists

KERALA DAMS OPENED, EVACUATIONS IN K'TAKA

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday virtually met the chief ministers of states on the west coast to discuss preparedness to handle the effects of Cyclone Tauktae. Faced with copious inflow, Kerala opened floodgates of dams, while downpour in Karnataka prompted large-scale evacuations. Response teams on the Maharashtra coast were on high alert

GUJARAT COAST BRACES FOR IMPACT

- Squally winds and heavy rains reported in Goa. Mumbai officials shifted Covid patients, fearing power failure due to the cyclone
- Tauktae to make landfall between Porbandar and Mahuva in Bhavnagar district; fishers, coastal residents being evacuated
- Huge tidal waves, strong winds and heavy downpour predicted

High alert

OFFICIALS WORKING TO ENSURE UNINTERRUPTED COVID CARE

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Slow off the starting blocks for Covaxin mass production

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@New Delhi

INDIA got off the blocks slowly to make Bharat Biotech's Covaxin an open source vaccine within the country for its mass production, as any company that participates in it would need at least six months for the assembly line to start rolling.

For, jabs such as Covaxin need highly sophisticated Biosafety Level 3 (BSL-3) labs, which is only available with Bharat Biotech at the moment. BSL-3 labs work with agents that could cause serious or potentially lethal disease through inhalation to the personnel, and may contaminate the environment, hence the high-safety parameters.

While India has just over a dozen such labs at present, most of them are with academic institutions for testing and research. Upgrading existing BSL-3 labs to produce Covaxin is a long-term process, says a senior Bharat Biotech official.

Sudhanshu Vrati, a virologist, told *TNIE*, "The government laboratories we have at present across India are only meant for research and are not designed for production. Even if a pharma company starts work to set up a BSL-3 lab, it will take at least three to six months to do so, after which it will require certification."

"Even if we assume that the government does the certification in a week's time, vaccine production and hitting the market will take more than six months."

Eminent virologist Dr Jacob John concurred. He said even if the Centre ropes in additional labs to produce vaccines, it may take three to six months for the vaccine to be produced. "By that time, the pandemic itself would be over. We must have done this by October 2020, so that there was enough vaccine by January this year," Dr John said. P8

Cyclone Tauktae leaves four dead in state

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

CYCLONE Tauktae that has been ravaging states along the Western coast in the country left at least four dead in Karnataka on Sunday. Seven districts – Udupi, Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Kodagu, Shivamogga, Chikkamagaluru and Hassan – have been the worst hit in the state.

According to a situation report by the Karnataka State Disaster Management Authority, till Sunday evening, 98 villages in 20 taluks suffered extensive damage. Udupi, Shivamogga, Uttara Kannada and Chikkamagaluru reported one death each.

Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa on Sunday called deputy commissioners and incharge ministers of each of the affected districts to take stock of the situation and assured them of all assistance. Six out of the seven worst-hit districts have also been struggling with a surge in Covid cases. "The CM asked the incharge ministers and DCs to pay attention to rescue and relief measures as well as Covid management simultaneously. He has assured them of any additional assistance required. DCs can contact the minister concerned or him directly," said a statement from the Chief Minister's Office. Later in the evening, the CM once again spoke to Chief Secretary P Ravi Kumar and DCs of Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada and Udupi, urging them to rescue fishermen stranded at sea. P5

The beach at Baikambady, Surathkal, is strewn with debris in the aftermath of Cyclone Tauktae, on the outskirts of Mangaluru on Sunday | EXPRESS

State to spend ₹15 cr to strengthen SDRF

The government is strengthening the State Disaster Response Force, Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai said, adding that ₹15 crore will be spent to get new equipment and raise two more SDRF companies. P3

NATIONWIDE	MAY 15	MAY 16
Fresh cases	3,26,098	3,11,170
Recoveries	3,53,299	3,62,437
Deaths	3,890	4,077

JAB-O-METER — TAKE YOUR SHOT
May 15: 17,14,247 doses
May 16: 17,33,232 doses
TOTAL DOSES: 18,22,20,164

Chief of Centre's Covid advisory group resigns

Shahid Jameel was critical of govt's Covid response during the ongoing second wave

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @New Delhi

SENIOR virologist Shahid Jameel on Sunday resigned as the chair of the scientific advisory group of Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG), a forum established by the Centre in December last. It was set up for lab and epidemiological surveillance of strains of the Covid-19 virus circulating in India.

It is not clear why Jameel, who is the director of the Trivedi School of Biosciences at Ashoka University, stepped down as the chief advisor to the forum, but sources pointed out that he had been critical of the Covid-19 policies of the government. Jameel, formerly the CEO of the Wellcome Trust DBT India Alliance and known for his research on hepatitis E virus, confirmed to this newspaper his decision, but refused to comment further. No response was received to a request for comment from health secretary Rajesh Bhushan either.

INSACOG was set up by the Centre less than five months ago, mainly to detect genomic variants of the SARS CoV 2 after concerns over B117 variant, first detected in the UK, having reached India.

Under the consortium, 10 national laboratories equipped to study virus variants were brought under the aegis of the National Centre for Disease Control. The regional genome sequencing labs, which are part of the project, include CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology in Delhi, CSIR Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in Hyderabad, DBT National Institute of Biomedical Genomics near Kolkata, DBT- Institute of Life Sciences in Bhubaneswar, DBT-NCBS in Bengaluru, DBT-Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics in Hyderabad.

It also includes NIV and DBT National Centre for Cell Science in Pune, National Centre for Disease Control in Delhi and the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences in Bengaluru. The forum has been marred by severe fund crunch since the beginning as a result of which the work it was tasked to do has progressed on a much lesser speed than projected.

'Stubborn response'

Jameel was critical of the government's Covid policies. Most recently, he had written a piece in the *New York Times*, saying scientists in India were facing "stubborn response to evidence-based policy making".

Clock ticks away for Karnataka: Over 82% wait to be vaccinated

RAMU PATIL & CHETANA BELAGERE @Bengaluru

VAX WORRIES - 2

THE clock is ticking away for Karnataka on the vaccine front even as the anticipated third wave looms large.

Over 82 per cent of those eligible for Covid vaccinations are yet to be inoculated against the dreaded disease, while 66.4 lakh beneficiaries are waiting for their second dose.

In absolute numbers, those waiting to be vaccinated account for about 4.22 crore across the state among the vaccine-eligible population of about 5.11 crore people (above 18 years of age).

The numbers show a grim picture. The Health Department may find it extremely difficult to speed up the vaccination even as it grapples with shortages.

From January 16 (when the vaccination programme was launched) till May 16, up to 1,11,88,143 people have been vaccinated. This includes those who have taken the first dose and those completing both doses.

As per data accessed by *The New Indian Express*, the state's total target was to vaccinate 8.6 lakh Health Care Workers with both doses, but so far only 4,60,437 have completed both vaccines.

At least 2.4 lakh health care workers are waiting for the second dose, while 1.6 lakh for their first dose.

To vaccinate this segment, the government requires 5.6 lakh doses.

CONTINUED ON: P3

KARNATAKA	MAY 15	MAY 16
Fresh cases	41,664	31,531
Recoveries	34,425	36,475
Deaths	349	403

As state battles Covid, Railway Minister seeks ₹847 crore in dues

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

EVEN as the Karnataka Government grapples with shortage of vaccines, oxygen and hospital beds, and stretches its resources to manage the humongous Covid-19 crisis, besides the latest havoc wreaked by Cyclone Tauktae along the state's coast, the Union Government has sprung a shock.

It has asked the State Government to deposit its outstanding share of ₹847.02 crore for railway projects implemented on cost-sharing basis by both, as well as acquire land required for three ongoing railway projects. It has also asked the state to deposit its financial share for projects proposed for the ongoing financial year.

In a letter to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, Railway Minister **Piyush Goyal** said the execution of cost-sharing projects for Karnataka was getting affected because the state was not depositing its share. An amount of ₹847.02 crore was outstanding, it said.

Also urging the state to hand over land required for projects at the earliest, the letter dated May 3 says, "It is informed that Railways had deposited ₹80.63 crore acquisition of 608.21 hectares of land for three railway projects, but land is yet to be handed over by the State Government. Non-acquisition of land is resulting in delay in execution of projects, besides blockage of Railway's capital with State Government, which otherwise could have been utilised for execution of projects in the State." P5

WITH THIS ISSUE — THE ESSENTIAL CAMPUS DIGEST edex — 32 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF EDEX (TABLOID), 4 OF CITY EXPRESS

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RIGHT MODEL

AP village shows the way to keep virus at bay

SISTLA DAKSHINA MURTHY @Vijayawada

EVEN as Covid-19 has been widespread across the country, here is a village in Andhra Pradesh which has remained unaffected by the virus so far. Duggiralapadu in G Konduru mandal of Krishna district is probably the only village in the entire State with the distinction of not recording even a single Covid case so far.

The village adjacent to neighbouring Telangana has a population of 1,000. Majority of people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. The villagers have taken all necessary precautions since the outbreak of pandemic to protect themselves. Curbs have been imposed on entry of outsiders, with entry points to the village being barricaded.

Villagers spray disinfectant at Duggiralapadu village in Andhra Pradesh | SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

G Mallikharjuna Rao (54), a resident of Duggiralapadu, attributes non-emergence of even a single Covid case in the village to strict adherence to Covid guidelines by all. "No one in the village ventures out without wearing a mask and carrying sanitiser," he says.

Sanitation workers carry out fogging operations and spraying of sodium hypochlorite solution in the village twice a week. Drains in the village are cleaned on alternate days. "We have eight provision stores in our village. People of one ward are allowed to purchase essential commodities on a particular day to avoid crowding," says A Nagalakshmi, another resident. The people have unanimously decided not to conduct any festival, fair or other ritual in the village to avoid public gathering. No one in Duggiralapadu attends functions in relatives' houses in neighbouring villages during Covid times.